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Panel clears shift of AMC to Redstone

Vote could come today on Missile Defense Agency

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Redstone Arsenal will gain a new command and a four-star general if the Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommendations made Wednesday are approved by the president and Congress next month.

The nine-member BRAC panel, which is meeting this week in Crystal City, Va., recommended that the headquarters of the Army Materiel Command be relocated from Fort Belvoir, Va., to Redstone.

Slated for a possible vote today are proposals to relocate the headquarters for the Space & Missile Defense Command and the bulk of work done by the Missile Defense Agency from Arlington, Va., to Redstone.

"We are happy here in Crystal City," Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee co-chair Joe Ritch told The Times. "We are right where we thought we would be, and (we) are very happy about today. Everything we thought would happen today happened.

"The Army Materiel Command is a big, big deal for us. It's the first time we know of that a four-star will be located in Alabama."

There is some contention about moving Missile Defense Agency work here, Ritch said, and "there will be some discussion on that" at today's BRAC hearings, he said.

The MDA vote is listed as a "continuous item" on the BRAC panel agenda. There was no word, Ritch said, as to why the MDA moves could be a matter of debate.

"We are still cautiously optimistic," he said. "I think we will get what we have worked for here."

Pentagon figures released in May said that at least 1,600 new federal jobs could come to Huntsville as a result of the BRAC, and observers said a few thousand contractor jobs could follow. However, the total job numbers are still unclear, and local officials aren't speculating. Lt. Gen. Trey Obering, head of the Missile Defense Agency, said during a recent appearance in Huntsville that MDA alone could bring more than 2,000 workers here.

In addition to the major commands, the BRAC panel voted to approve Pentagon plans for Redstone to gain a multiservice helicopter test center, pulled from Fort Rucker in southeast Alabama and Robins Air Force Base outside Atlanta.

The panel also approved plans to move the 2nd Recruiting Brigade from Fort Gillem in Atlanta to Redstone.

Fort Gillem is one of four major military bases in the Atlanta area that on Wednesday were voted to be realigned or closed.

The panel also approved two recommendations that would move work from Redstone - a munitions and ordnance school and a robotics office.

Under the panel recommendations, Redstone would lose the Army Munitions, Ordnance and Electronics School, with about 900 Army students and 95 military instructors and other workers. The school was established in 1953 to show soldiers how to use the missiles being developed at the arsenal.

All the recommendations will have to be approved by President Bush and the full Congress.

"Today is a good day for Redstone and all of North Alabama," said U.S. Rep. Bud Cramer, D-Huntsville.

"I welcome these significant additions to our community and look forward to working with them during their transition. While I am excited about today's actions, we must continue to remain watchful as the BRAC Commission decides on the remaining recommendations for Redstone."

U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Tuscaloosa, also gave the plan his stamp of approval.

"I am pleased that Redstone Arsenal will be the new home to the Army Materiel Command headquarters. Moving AMC's headquarters to Redstone Arsenal will result in cost savings and co-location with similar missions," Shelby said in a prepared statement.

"I look forward to welcoming (AMC commander Gen. Benjamin Griffin) and the command headquarters to Huntsville."